



Sgt. Phillip Spence and Sgt. John Wall perform system checks before the exercise.



The launch pods are directed toward a target downrange.



A German Howitzer 2000 team awaits fire orders on the Bergen gunnery range.



An MLRS crew chief guides his driver during the railhead convoy to Baumholder.

Operation Combined

Thunder rocks and rolls in Bergen

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BERGEN/MUNSTER, Germany – The ground rumbled as a split-second growling flash of intense blue-yellow light illuminated the gunnery range and was gone. The acrid smoke from the rocket's lift-off rolled across the field where three Multiple Launch Rocket System vehicles sat in the gathering darkness. The radio in the command vehicle crackled with a final command as a crewmember from one of the launchers announced, "Two-two, shot out!"

The launch was only one part of an intense month-long exercise. Operation Combined Thunder brought together powerful weapons,

soldiers and crews from the 1st Battalion, 94th Field Artillery and elements of Germany's 5th Panzer Division. The operation in Bergen and Munster in northern Germany was a Partnership for Peace exercise designed to allow NATO units opportunities for integrated training on missions and weapon systems.

"This is a great example of intra-operability training with the Germans," stated Maj. Arlen Logan, 1st Bn., 94th Field Artillery S-3 OIC. "It's a great chance for us to be actually out on the ground maneuvering and combining our fires and seeing how our systems and techniques may or may not be compatible with one another."

The newest and the most lethal addition to the division took their MLRS M270s to Munster for a combined live-fire with 5th Panzer Division's newest and most technologically advanced piece of artillery, the Howitzer 2000, according to Logan.

"We have the Panzer Howitzer 2000, which will be the most modern piece of artillery in the world at this time," stated 1st Lt. Michael Diers, S-3 OIC of DIVARTY, 5th Panzer Division. "Everything is automatic on it...it brings the shell automatically into the tube. Its communications have changed a bit and the adjust-to-fire controls are all computer buttons now."

Not unfamiliar to many 1AD soldiers, the MLRS is a versatile and highly lethal weapon system. "It is probably the greatest killer of the field artillery," said Staff Sgt. Wyatt Young of Battery A, 1st Bn., 94th Field Artillery. "Some people call it the grid-smasher. We can shoot 12 missiles in one minute or two rockets in 60 seconds."

Young, an MLRS section chief, and his crew, Sgt. James Dunbar and Spc. Jeremy Cooke, qualified for fire during the joint exercise. "It's exciting!" exclaimed Cooke.

The live-fire exercise began south of Munster Training Area. Just outside the small town of Essel, 5th Panzer and 1AD tracked vehicles and wheeled vehicles prepared for a joint-operation

convoy. The mission was to move two battalion-sized elements in convoy to a bridge-crossing maneuver under the cover of darkness. As the convoy elements moved into place, a Panzer engineer unit quickly set struts and bridge lengths in preparation for the river crossing. After the bridge crossing, the soldiers had to convoy tracks and wheels approximately 40 kilometers to the gunnery areas for the live-fire scheduled to begin the following morning.

"These joint exercises are important," concluded Diers. "We need to try to make things compatible so that you can mix a task force from Americans, Germans, Britains or whatever so that we will still be able to support peacekeeping operations in the future."

"This is a great example of intra-operability training with the Germans."

- Maj. Arlen Logan,
1-94 FA S-3 OIC

A Mobile Launch Rocket System (MLRS) fires a rocket into the night sky in Bergen, Germany, during Operation Combined Thunder.

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